

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BUJUMB 00933 290928Z

67

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FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA

TO AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 5702

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 0933

N.O9811652: GDS

TAGS: PINR, BY

SUBJECT: LONGIN KANUMA, BURUNDI'S AMBASSADOR TO GABON

REF: LIBREVILLE 2151

1. LONGIN KANUMA, BURUNDI'S FIRST AMBASSADOR TO GABON, IS A LONG TIME GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL AND UPRONA PARTY FUNCTIONARY, WHO IS OF THE RULING MINORITY TUTSI ETHNIC GROUP AND WHO IS CONSIDERED TO BE A CLOSE FRIEND OF PRESIDENT MICHEL MICOMBERO.

2. BORN AROUND 1942 IN BURURI PROVINCE IN THE SOUTHER PART OF THE COUNTRY, AN AREA OF ORIGIN OF MICOMBERO AND OF MANY OTHERS WITHIN BURUNDI'S CURRENT POLITICAL LEADERSHIP, KANUMA WAS EDUCATED AT THE BELGIAN COLONIAL SCHOOL OF ADMINISTRATION AT ASTRIDA (BUTARE) IN NEIGHBORING RWANDA. HE FIRST APPEARED IN GOVERNMENT CIRCLES IN 1967 AS A VICE-GOVERNOR OF BUJUMBURA PROVINCE AND A MEMBER OF THE POLITICALSBUREAU OF UPR, BURUNDI'S SOLE AUTHORIZED PARTY. DESPITE THE FACT THAT HE SPENT SEVERAL MONTHS OF HIS POLITBURO TERM IN JAIL AS THE RESULT OF A BRAWL AT A LOCAL NIGHT SPOT (A NOT UNUSUAL EVENT DURING THE YOUTH OF A NUMBER OF BURUNDI'S LEADERS), HE WAS NAMED GOVERNOR OF BUJUMBURA PROVINCE IN 1969 AND REMAINED IN THAT OFFICE UNTIL MID-1971, WHEN HE WAS APPOINTED
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PAGE 02 BUJUMB 00933 290928Z

GOVERNOR OF BURURI PROVINCE. APPARENTLY BECAUSE HE DID NOT WISH TO LEAVE THE CAPITAL, HE DID NOT REMAIN LONG IN BURURI.

INDEED, HIS BIOGRAPHIC FILE HAS HIM MOSTLY AROUND BUJUMBURA FROM 1971-73, HOLDING A PARTY BRANCH CHAIRMANSHIP AND HOPCEG IN VAIN TO BE NAMED MUONAL EXECUTIVE SECRETARY (THE NUMBER TWO JOB) OF UPRONA. IN DECEMBER 1973 HE WAS NAMED INSTEAD FIRST SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PARTY'S YOUTH GROUP, JEUNESSE REVOLUTIONNAIRES RWAGASORE (JRR). HE ALSO SERVED BRIEFLY AS MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS FROM JANUARY TO MARCH 1974. LATER, IN SEPTEMBER 1974, THE PRESIDENT ADDED THE LEADERSHIP OF THE BURUNDI CONFEDERATION OF SPORTS TO HIS DUTIES AS JRR SECRETARY GENERAL AND AGAIN GAVE HIM THE RANK AND PRIVILEGES OF A MINISTER. HE TRAVELLED IN THE PROVINCES DURING 1975 TRYING TO INSTILL SOME LIFE INTO GENERALLY LACKLUSTER PARTY YOUTH ACTIVITIES. HIS APPOINTMENT AS AN AMBASSADOR CAME IN MID-FEBRUARY 1976, BUT HIS POST OF ASSIGNMENT WAS NOT ANNOUNCED UNTIL AUGUST.

3. HE IS MARRIED WITH FIVE CHILDREN AND, LIKE ALMOST ALL SENIOR TUTSIS, APPEARS TO HAVE ACQUIRED THE WHEREWITHAL TO LIVE IN RELATIVELY LUXURIOUS STYLE. HE IS CATHOLIC AND, AS FAR AS IS KNOWN, SPEAKS ONLY FRENCH AND THE LOCAL LANGUAGE, KIRUNDI.

4. THE EMBASSY'S ACQUAINTANESHIP WITH KANUMA OVER THE YEARS HAS NEVER BEEN MORE THAN SUPERFICIAL. HE IS OUTWARDLY PLEASANT DURING SPECIAL CONTACTS, BUT NOTHING IS KNOWN OF HIS PERSONAL VIEWS OTHER THAN HIS APPARENT IDENTIFICATION IN THE LATE SIXTIES WITH THE MORE RADICAL ELEMENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT.

5. COMMENTS BY AMBASSADOR MARK: IN HIS ONE LENGTHY CONVERSATION WITH ME (MID-1975), HE URGED ME TO ARRANGE FOR THE U.S. TO SUPPLY SOME RESIDENT SPORTS COACHES TO BURUNDI. WHEN I TOLD HIM THESE COULD PERHAPS COME IN THE FRAMEWORK OF A PEACE CORPS PRESENCE (WHICH BURUNDI HAS UP TO NOW REJECTED) HE DROPPED THE SUBJECT FOR GOOD.

6. MY GENERAL IMPRESSION IS THAT KANUMA IS AN INTELLECTUAL LIGHTWEIGHT WHOSE GOOD FAMILY CONNECTIONS AND RIGHT REGIONAL ORIGIN (BURURI) HAVE GOTTEN HIM SENIOR, BUT NEVER TOP, REGIME JOBS. HE IS PROBABLY NOT CLOSE TO THE MAIN POWER CLIQUE AT
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PAGE 03 BUJUMB 00933 290928Z

PRESENT, AND HE HAS BEEN SENT OFF TO LIBREVILLE IN AN HONORABLE BUT ESSENTIALLY MARGINAL JOB TO LOOK OUT FOR BURUNDI'S NEW COMMERCIAL INTERESTS AND EXPATRIATE LABORERS IN GABON.
MARK

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